

## New Zealand seeks clarity on India's military ambitions

Lt. Gen. Tim Keating

As India expands its influence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, New Zealand's Chief of Defence Force Lt. Gen. Tim Keating has sought clarity on a probable military component to New Delhi's 'Act East' policy.

In an exclusive interview to *The Hindu*, Lt. Gen. Keating, currently on a visit to India, said, "We want to understand as India grows, how it intends to grow its influence militarily both regionally and near region. What does 'Act East' mean? We can see that economically and politically. But does that have a military element? From a military strategic point getting that understanding whether there are common interests and how they can be managed is important for us."

### Role of the Quad

Lt. Gen. Keating also queried the objectives of the recently resurrected quadrilateral (Quad) comprising India, Australia, Japan and the U.S. New Zealand has always balanced its relations with the U.S. and China.

He observed that the Quad need not necessarily be a military agreement at this stage but four large influential nations developing a common policy framework to various opportunities and potential threats in the region.

Asked if New Zealand would be interested in joining the grouping at some point, Lt. Gen. Keating said, "There is lot of clarity to be gained about what the Quad is. What does it mean to the four individual nations.... I will be very interested to engage my Indian counterparts to see what Quad means to them and put a question — do they see a role for New Zealand?"

Last year on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Manila, the Quad countries had discussed reviving the decade-old grouping, seen by China as an attempt to contain it. The developments follow China's rapidly increasing military presence in the Indian Ocean and the expansion of dual use facilities and infrastructure by Beijing under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Lt. Gen. Keating noted that while India and New Zealand are far away geographically, they had common interests.

During his visit, Lt. Gen. Keating will hold discussions with senior members of the security establishment including Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat and Chairman of the Chief of the Staff Committee Adm. Sunil Lanba.

Lt. Gen. Keating said New Zealand would like to know how big countries like India and China approached the rules-based global order.

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